

Organic eggs in a horticultural enterprise

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2012 Organic Producer Conference
Aston University
Birmingham

Background



- * Leen Organics is based near Crusheen, Co. Clare
- * Farming on 4 acres since 1997
- * .75 of an acre of vegetables outside
- * .25 of an acre under plastic
- * .75 of an acre for 45 hens
- * The rest of the land is bog, scrub and two houses

Situation

- * Land is on a drumlin facing South East
- * Soil type; is clay loam going to mineral bog soil
- * Elevation; 80 metres above sea level
- * Annual Rainfall 928mm 31in at Shannon airport



History of enterprise

- * Started with laying hens in 1998
- * 25 Hy- Line at 18 weeks point of lay
- * Subsequently increased to 45 with next flock
- * Selling at Farmers' Market and through a shop
- * Have kept up to 100 hens but was overstocked
- * The last flock I got were Blackrock reared from day old chicks

Features of the system

- * The use of two rotated paddocks
- * Mobile electric fences for maximum flexibility when grazing
- * Trees planted to replicate the hens natural environment
- * Same age flock reared on the farm
- * 45 hens in total

Advantages



- * Very saleable product
- * Brings people to the market stall
- * Extra income from land that would not really be farmed otherwise
- * Good to have some livestock
- * Close as could get to a mixed farm on this scale

Advantages

- * Produce manure (valuable commodity)
- * Eat slugs (some breeds better than others at this)
- * Eat waste and surplus produce and weeds
- * Run on vegetable fields in winter/spring
- * Good way of incorporating green manures
- * Keep the grass down in the summer



Disdvantages

- * Can make a mess especially in prolonged wet weather
- * Need attention morning and evening
- * Prone to predation
- * Eggs get dirty and have to be cleaned for sale
- * Hen feed not very sustainable as coming long distance from all over the world
- * Time consuming and expensive replacing flock
- * Cost of feedstuffs
- * Availability of stock especially organic
- * Attract vermin

Economics

- * Approximately 100€ per bird a year gross profit after cost of feed and cost of chick are taken into account
- * This does not account for labour or indirect costs such as housing, fencing etc. which will be written off over a longer period of time



Issues for the future

- * Need to expand my enterprise but no land on which to do this
- * The need to find a breed suitable to organic farming needs
- * Further research into alternative diets for poultry that feedstuffs can be produced locally
- * Research into the optimum herbage for hens



www.leenorganics.com

